

*Washington, DC* – U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-NY19) flew Thursday, October 18th from Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington, DC to Kuwait, then to Iraq with a bipartisan Congressional Delegation to visit U.S. troops and meet with Iraqi government officials and American military leaders.

"My time in Iraq further deepened my respect and admiration for our troops, but also reaffirmed my belief that the United States must bring its involvement in this war to an end," said Hall.

Hall ate lunch with servicemen and women from New York at the Balad Airbase in Iraq.

"The troops and I had a wide-ranging discussion of the war and future U.S. policy," said Hall. "Officers, medical teams, and enlisted men and women all are displaying creativity, commitment, and a work ethic that should make us all proud."

In Baghdad, Hall and his delegation met with a number of senior U.S. and Iraq officials, including Iraqi Vice President Adil Abdulmahdi, U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker, Regional Intelligence staff, and had dinner with General David Petraeus, a native of the town of Cornwall in the 19th Congressional District.

"Unfortunately, we seem to be no closer to the political reconciliation needed to achieve stability in Iraq," said Hall. "After our briefings, it seemed to me that loyalties to sects or individual leaders still overwhelmed any belief in the national government, and concerns about the reliability of the Iraqi security forces persist. Ambassador Crocker told our delegation that 'the Maliki government is somewhere between challenged and dysfunctional.'"

From Baghdad, Hall flew to the city of Ramadi in Anbar Province, where he and his group were taken to visit a local market.

"As we strolled past stalls selling fruit, or clothing, or ice cream, and handed toys to children and their parents, we were encircled by dozens of American troops with their helmets and body armor on, and carrying automatic weapons pointed out in all directions," said Hall. "In light of the fact that Ramadi is cited as one of the safest cities in Iraq, it is difficult to imagine what conditions are like for our troops or for the average Iraqi in other parts of the country. Everywhere we went, there were concrete barriers, armed soldiers, and protective measures that were distinct reminders that we were in a war zone. At no point were we ever in an area that would resemble a normal neighborhood or market in America; at no time were we without a heavily armed escort."

On the way home from Iraq, Hall stopped in Germany to visit wounded soldiers at the Landstuhl Medical Center, including a serviceman from Highland Falls, NY.